

# Hagar of the Pawnshop

BY  
FERGUS  
HUME

## THE TENTH CUSTOMER AND THE PERSIAN RING

One of the last customers of any note who came to the Lambeth pawnshop was a slender, wiry man with an Oriental face, not unlike that of Hagar herself. His countenance was oval, his nose aquiline in shape, and he possessed two dark, sparkling eyes; also a long black beard, well trimmed and well kept. In fact, this beard was the neatest thing about him, as his dress—a European garb—was miserably poor and the purple hued cloth which he had twisted round his head for a turban was worn and soiled. He was, nevertheless, a striking figure when he presented himself before Hagar, and she examined him with a particular interest. There was a gypsy look about the tenth customer, which seemed to stamp him as one of the gentle Romany. Even keen-eyed Hagar was deceived.

"Are you of our people?" she asked abruptly, after looking at him for a moment or so.

"I do not understand," replied the man, in very good English, but with a foreign accent. "What people you speak of?"

"The Romany—the gypsy tribes."

"No, lady; I no of dem. I know what they are—oh, yes, they in my own country as in dis."

"Where is your country?" demanded Hagar, vexed at her mistake.

"Iran; what you call Persia," replied the customer. "My name, lady, is Alec; I come from Ispahan dese two year. Oh, yes; a long time I do stop in his town."

"A Persian?" said Hagar, looking at his swarthy face and delicate features.

"I don't think I ever saw a Persian before. You are very like one of the Romany; not at all like a Gentle."

"Lady, I no Gentle. I no Christian; I am follower ob de prophet. May his name be blessed! But dis not what I do come to speak," he added, with some impatience. "You give money on ring, eh?"

"Let me see the ring first," said Hagar diplomatically.

Alec, as he called himself, slipped the ring in question off one of his slender brown fingers, and handed it to her in silence. It was a band of dead gold, rather broad, and set in it was an oval turquoise of azure hue, marked with Arabic letters in gold. The ring had the look of a talisman or amulet, as the queer hieroglyphics on the stone seemed the words of some charm, stamped thereon to avert evil. Hagar examined the ring carefully, as she had never seen one like it before.

"It is a queer stone," she said, after looking through a magnifying glass at the turquoise. "What do you want on it?"

"One pound," replied Alec promptly. "Just for two—three days. Eh, what! you give me dat?"

Oh, yes; I think the ring is worth five times as much. Here is the money; I'll make out the ticket in your name of Alec. How do you spell it?"

The Persian took the ticket from Hagar, and in very fair English letters wrote down his name and address. Then with a bow he turned to leave the shop, but before he reached the door she called him back.

"I say, Alec, what do these gold marks on this stone mean?"

"Dey Arabic letters, lady. Dey a spell against de Jinns. 'In de name ob Allah de All Merciful.' Dat what dem letters say."

"They say a good deal with a word or two," muttered Hagar. "Arabic must be something like shorthand. When do you want back the ring?" she asked, aloud.

"In two—three days," replied the Persian. "Say dis week. Yes. Good night, lady; you keep dat ring all right. Yes. So."

Alec took himself out of the shop with another bow, and Hagar, after a further examination of the queer ring with its talismanic inscription, put it away on a tray with other jewels. She wondered very much if it had a story attached to it, and having read the "Arabian Nights" of late, she compared it in her own mind to the ring of Aladdin.

It looked like a jewel with a history, did that inscribed turquoise.

In the afternoon of the next day another Persian arrived. Hagar recognized him as the man from the pawnshop, and indeed, but for the difference in expression the two men might have passed for twins. Alec had a soft look in his eyes, a melancholy twist to his mouth; while this countryman of his had a hawklike and dangerous fierceness stamped on his lean face. He was dressed similarly to Alec, but wore a yellow turban instead of a purple one, and gave his name to Hagar as Mohammed; also, he took out of his pocket a pawn ticket, which he handed to the girl.

"Alec, my countryman, he send dis," said he, in broken but very fair English. "He want de ring which he leave here."

"Why doesn't he come for it himself?" asked Hagar, suspiciously.

"Alec ill; him very bad; he ask me to get de ring. But if you no gib me—why, I tell Alec he come himself den."

"Oh, there is no necessity for him to do so," replied Hagar, getting the ring. "You would not have the ticket with you if everything was not square. Here is Alec's property. One pound and interest. Thank you, Mr. Mohammed. By the way, you are a friend of Alec?"

"Yes; I come to dis place when he come," replied Mohammed, passively, "him very great friend of me. Two year we in his land."

"Both of you speak English very well."

"Thank you, yes; we learn our English in Persia for long time, and when we here we spoke always—always. Goot-tay; I do take dis to Alec."

"I say," called out Hagar, "has that ring a story?"

"What, dis? I no know. His charm against de Jinns; but dat's all. Goot-day; I go quick to Alec. Goot-day."

He went away with the ring on his finger, leaving Hagar disappointed that the strange jewel with its golden letters had not some wild tale attached to it. However, the ring was gone, and she never expected to hear anything more of it, or of the two Persians. A week passed, and no Alec made his appearance; so Hagar concluded that everything was right, and that he had really sent Mohammed to redeem the ring.

On the eighth day of its redemption she was undeceived, for Alec himself made his appearance in the shop. Hagar was surprised to see him.

The poor man looked ill, and his brown face was terribly lean and worn in its looks. An expression of anxiety lurked in his soft black eyes, and he could hardly command his voice as he asked her to give him the ring. The request was so unexpected that Hagar could only stare at him in silence. It was a moment or so before she could find words.



"Poor Alec!"

"The ring," she said, in tones of astonishment. "Why, you have it! Did not your friend Mohammed give it—"

"Mohammed!" cried Alec, clenching his hands, and the next moment he had fallen insensible on the outer floor of the shop. The single mention of the name of Mohammed in connection with the ring had stricken the poor Persian to the heart. His entrance, his behavior, his fainting—all three were unexpected and inexplicable.

Recovering from her first surprise, Hagar ran to the assistance of the fallen man. She was soon revived by the application of cold water, and when he could rise Hagar, like the Good Samaritan she was, conducted him into the back parlor and made him lie down on the sofa.

But more than ordinary weakness was the matter with that man; he was suffering from want of food, and told Hagar faintly that he had eaten nothing for two days. At once the girl set victuals before him and warmed some soup to nourish him.

Alec ate sparingly but well, and although he refused to touch wine, as a follower of the Prophet, he soon became stronger and more cheerful. His gratitude to Hagar knew no bounds.

"You are as charitable as Fatima, the daughter ob our Lord Mohammed," said he, gratefully, "and your good deed, it will be talked ob by de angel Gabriel on de Last Day."

"How is it you are so poor?" asked Hagar, resting under this praise.

"Ah, lady, dat one big, long story." "Connected with the ring?"

"Yes, yes; dat ring would haf mate me reach," replied the Persian, with a sigh; "but now dat weeked one vill git my moneys. Aha! said Alec, furiously, 'dat Mohammed is de son ob a burnt fazzer!'"

"He is a scoundrel certainly! How did he get the pawn ticket?"

"He took it away when I ill."

"Why did he want the ring?"

Alec reflected for a moment, and then he evidently made up his mind what he meant to pursue. "I weel tell you, lady," he said, looking with thankful eyes at Hagar. "You haf been good to me. I weel tell you de story ob my life—ob de ring."

"I know dat ring had some story connected with it," said Hagar, contentedly. "Go on, Alec; I am all attention."

The Persian obeyed forthwith; but, as his English was imperfect at times, it will be as well to set forth the story in the vernacular. Being still weak, it took Alec some time to tell the whole tale, but Hagar heard him patiently to the end. His narrative was not without interest.

"I was born in Ispahan," said the Persian, in his grave voice, "and I am a Miarza—what you call here a tribes—in my own country. My father was an officer of the Shah's household, and very wealthy. When he died I, as his only son, inherited his wealth. I was young, rich, and not at all bad looking, so I expected to lead a pleasant

life. The Shah, who had protected my father, continued the sun of his favor to me, and I accompanied him to the court at Teheran, where I speedily became high in his favor. But alas!"

added Alec, in the flowery language of his country, "soon did I cover the face of pleasure with the veil of mourning, and ride the horse of folly into the country of sorrow."

He paused, and then added, with a sigh: "Her name was Ayesha."

"Ah!" said Hagar, the cynic. "I was waiting to hear the name of the woman. She rivaled you I suppose."

"She and another," sighed Alec, stroking his beard. "I melted like wax in the flame of her beauty and my heart turned to water at the glance of her eyes. She was a Georgian, and fairer than the chief wife of Sulaiman bin Daoud. But alas! what saith Saladi? 'Wed a charmer and wed sorrow!'"

"Well," said Hagar, rather patiently. "I know all about her looks. Go on with the story."

"On my head be it!" said Alec. "I purchased this Georgian in Ispahan and made her my third wife; but so lovely and clever she was that I speedily raised her to the rank of the first. I adored her beauty and marveled at her wit. She sang like a bulbul and danced like a Peri."

"She seems to have been a wonder, Alec! Go on."

"There was a man called Achmet, who hated me very much," continued Alec, his eye lighting up fiercely at the mention of the name. "He saw that I was rich and favored by the king of kings, so he set his wits to work to ruin me. Having heard of my beautiful wife Ayesha, he told the Shah of her loveliness, which was that of a houri in paradise. Fired by the description, my sovereign visited at my house, and I received him with due splendor. He saw all my treasures—among others, my wife."

"I thought you Turks never presented your wives to strangers?"

"We are Persians, not Turks," corrected Alec, quietly, "and the Shah is no stranger in the houses of his subjects. Also, he has the right to pass the forbidden door to the abode of Felicity."

"What is the Abode of Felicity?"

"The harem, lady. But to tell you the story of my ruin."

"The Shah saw my beautiful Ayesha and her burning glances were as arrows of delight in his heart. He returned to his palace with a desire to possess my treasure. Achmet, who had right of access to the person of the Shah, strengthened this desire, and declared that I was unhappy with Ayesha."

"And were you?"

Alec sighed. "After the coming of the King of Kings I was," he confessed. "My wife wished to enter the royal harem, and warm herself in the glory of the royal sun. She was silent and melancholy, or cross and fierce. I did

what I could to console her, but she refused to listen to me, treated me as dirt beneath her feet, and sometimes she even smote me on the mouth with her pearl-embroidered slipper. Tales of our constant quarrels were carried to the Shah by the perfidious Achmet."

"In a fit of rage one day I said something like it," said Alec, darkly; "but I never intended my foolish speech to be taken seriously. However, these idle words were reported to the Shah, and he sent for me. 'Alec,' said he, 'it has been said thou deemest the meanest thing worn by us of more value than your wife Ayesha. If that be so, take this ring, which we give thee freely,

beautiful Georgian. At last Achmet told the king that I had wished I were rid of the woman, if only for her pearl-embroidered slipper. Tales of our constant quarrels were carried to the Shah by the perfidious Achmet."

"Did you say that?"

"In a fit of rage one day I said something like it," said Alec, darkly; "but I never intended my foolish speech to be taken seriously. However, these idle words were reported to the Shah, and he sent for me. 'Alec,' said he, 'it has been said thou deemest the meanest thing worn by us of more value than your wife Ayesha. If that be so, take this ring, which we give thee freely,

and surrender thy lightly valued wife to dwell in the shadow of our throne. Thou hast my leave to go.' Lady, I bowed myself to the ground. I took the ring you know of, and I went."

"Did you not say that you wished to keep Ayesha?"

"No; the word of the Shah is law. Had I expressed such a wish I should have lost my head; as it was, I lost my wife. Returning home, I made known the Shah's desire, and urged her to fly with me beyond his power. Desirous of entering the royal serail, however, she refused, and so I carried her off by force. I drugged her one night, placed her on a camel and set out for the nearest seaport disguised as a merchant."

"Was your flight successful?"

"Alas, no," replied Alec, in melancholy tones. "Achmet was on my watch, and had me followed. My wife was taken from me by force, but I was too willing on her own part. Forcibly I disobeyed the royal command, suffered the bastinado on the soles of my feet until I fainted away."

"Poor Alec!"

"Mad with anger, I let the words of the heart overpower the judgment of the mind, and rashly joined in the conspiracy to overthrow the King of Kings. Again my evil genius thwarted and discovered me. I was forced to fly from Persia to save my life; and all my wealth was forfeited to the royal treasury. A goodly portion of it, however, was given to Achmet for his having found out the conspiracy. After many adventures, which I need not relate here, I came to this land, where I have lived in poverty and misery for two years. My wife is a queen in the serail of the Shah; my enemy is the ruler of a province, and I, lady, am the exile you see. All that I carried out of the Shah's kingdom was the ring which he gave me in exchange for my beautiful Ayesha."

He paused, and Hagar waited for him to continue the story. Finding that he still kept silent, she addressed him impatiently: "Is that all?"

"Yes—except that since I have been here it has been told to me that both Achmet and Ayesha wish to get me back to Persia, that they may kill me. The Georgian never forgave me for carrying her away, and only my death will glut her vengeance. As for Achmet, he is never free from drink while I live, and wishes me to die also. If they can manage it, those two will have me carried back to Persia, and there have me slain."

"They can't take you out of London against your will."

Alec shook his head. "Who knows?" said he. "There is the case of the Chinaman who was lured into the embassy to be sent back to China. If this government of England had not interfered, he would have been a dead man by this time. I always keep away from the Persian embassy."

"You are wise to do so," replied Hagar, who remembered the case. "But about the ring. Why did you pawn it, and why did Mohammed steal it by means of the pawn ticket?"

"There was a friend of mine in Persia," explained Alec, "who saved for me out of my property seized by the Shah a box of jewels. Knowing that I was starving in this land, he sent the jewels to me in charge of a servant. I received a letter from him, in which he stated that the servant had been instructed to give up the jewels to me when I produced the ring. I foolishly told Mohammed about this, and one night he tried to steal the ring from me, thinking that he would show it to my friend's servant and get my jewels. In fear lest he should obtain it, I pawned it with you for safety until the servant should arrive."

"Is the servant here now?"

"He arrived last week," replied Alec, mournfully, "and he is now waiting for me at Southampton. But, alas! I speak foolishly. When I fell ill after pawning the ring Mohammed stole the ticket, and, as you know, he obtained the ring. I have no doubt that by this time he has shown it to the servant of my friend and is possessed of the jewels. Mohammed, the accursed, is rich, and I remain poor. Now, lady, you know why a darkness came over my spirit, and why I felt as one bereft of life. Surely, I am the sport of Fortune, and the most

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